

16 July 2019



Trinity Sunday, Family service and Baptism

New testament reading: Romans 5: 1-5

Gospel reading: John 16: 12-15

Today is father's day, a day when we celebrate what good fatherhood is all about. It has less of the sentimentality of Mother's day, and I rarely receive my breakfast in bed. Some have had good fathers, some not so good, but we do know good fatherhood when we see it and appreciate it. What is it that makes a good father? A Good family man? As someone has said, it is easy to father a child, but it is not so easy to be a good dad. Fatherhood is different from motherhood, because we men do not carry the child for the nine months of pregnancy; we have to stand aside and wait for the child to grow inside the mother. There was a very good book written called "How to be a pregnant father, which I found very helpful and humorous. It is not easy sometimes as the child seems to take priority in the situation and dad sometimes feels a bit pushed out. But as time goes on a good father will provide for the family and take the decisions for the family that will benefit the whole. I remember the day my children were born and the wishes I had for them as I contemplated their lives ahead of them. One of the most poignant pieces of writing on this was written 23 years ago by a BBC Correspondent in Hong Kong called Feargal Keane. His own father had been an alcoholic whose addiction had taken hold of him and caused the family to break up and he had died alone and in obscurity. So Feargal was thinking of this as he wrote a masterpiece in writing called "A letter to Daniel", written 6 days after his son was born:

Extract from "A letter to Daniel" Feargal Keane. BBC Radio 4 From our own correspondent 09/04/96

My dear son, it is six o'clock in the morning on the island of Hong Kong. You are asleep cradled in my left arm and I am learning the art of one-handed typing. Your mother, more tired yet more happy than I've ever known her, is sound asleep in the room next door and there is soft quiet in our apartment.

Since you've arrived, days have melted into night and back again and we are learning a new grammar, a long sentence whose punctuation marks are feeding and winding and nappy changing and these occasional moments of quiet....

Your coming has turned me upside down and inside out, so much that seemed essential to me has, in the past few days, taken on a different colour. Like many foreign correspondents I know, I have lived a life that, on occasion, has veered close to the edge: war zones, natural disasters, darkness in all its shapes and forms. In a world of insecurity and ambition and ego, it's easy to be drawn in, to take chances with our lives, to believe that what we do and what people say about us is reason enough to gamble with death. Now, looking at your sleeping face, inches away from me, listening to your occasional sigh and gurgle, I wonder how I could have ever thought glory and prizes and praise were sweeter than life.

And it's also true that I am pained, perhaps haunted is a better word, by the memory, suddenly so vivid now, of each suffering child I have come across on my journeys. To tell you the truth, it's nearly too much to bear at this moment to even think of children being hurt and abused and killed. And yet looking at you, the images come flooding back.

He then tells of some of the awful things he has seen in Rwanda, Palestine and other places

Daniel, these memories explain some of the fierce protectiveness I feel for you, the tenderness and the occasional moments of blind terror when I imagine anything happening to you. But there is something more, a story from long ago that I will tell you face to face, father to son, when you are older. It's a very personal story but it's part of the picture. It has to do with the long lines of blood and family, about our lives and how we can get lost in them and, if we're lucky, find our way out again into the sunlight.

He tells the story of his alcoholic father and then says

By the time his son had grown up, the man lived away from his family, on his own in a one-roomed flat, living and dying for the bottle. He died on the fifth of January, one day before the anniversary of his son's birth, all those years before in that snowbound city.

But his son was too far away to hear his last words, his final breath, and all the things they might have wished to say to one another were left unspoken. Yet now Daniel, I must tell you that when you let out your first powerful cry in the delivery room of the Adventist Hospital and I became a father, I thought of your grandfather and, foolish though it may seem, hoped that in some way he could hear, across the infinity between the living and the dead, your proud statement of arrival. For if he could hear, he would recognise the distinct voice of family, the sound of hope and new beginnings that you and all your innocence and freshness have brought to the world.

What would you like to say to Bobby and Betsy, and to Faye and Kenny at a time like this? What are your hopes and dreams for them, or for your own children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren or your wider family and their children? To be happy, whatever that means? But what will bring happiness? Wealth, good health, good education, friends? All these are important, but they do not happiness in itself - however easier they make life. In our baptism liturgy, the words we have just spoken, there is a prayer which is like a spiritual wish list for the children

Betsy, Bobby and Faye, may God, who has received you by baptism into his Church, pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory. Amen.

may God, who has received you by baptism into his Church,

We are appealing to what one writer calls "The Father heart of God, and making our prayer to God the Father, just like St Paul in Ephesians when he says he is "kneeling before the heavenly Father, from whom **every family in heaven and on earth takes**

its name”., or as another version puts it- **“from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth derives its name.”** Paul knows that God’s concern for the Ephesians, and for all people is that of a good loving father- caring supporting, providing, wanting the best for them, encouraging them to make the best of their talents, and it is to this aspect of God’s care that St Paul appeals. He is really saying, I pray that you will know God as the good father that he is, and that as you get to know Him you will find that he will provide all you need and be there for you. This father heart of God in his love is something that we all need, but especially at a time of rejoicing like this. But today is not just Father’s day, it is also Trinity Sunday- when we remember the Christian story is about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. As we have affirmed earlier in our Profession of Faith

Do you believe in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

I believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

I believe and trust in him.

This the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father’s love in creating and sustaining us, but also shown through the Son Jesus’ life

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

I believe and trust in him.

So we have prayed that God would **“pour upon you the riches of his grace”**

Grace given in Jesus Christ where God knew we could not live a life pleasing to him, however hard we try to be good, we always fall short, so His own son has lived the perfect life and died for us so that we can be forgiven and receive the benefits of Jesus taking away all our sins, by God’s grace, his God’s riches at Christ’s expense, unconditional and unmerited favour of God towards Jesus and then given to each one of us by faith.

that within the company of Christ’s pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit,

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

I believe and trust in him.

The Holy spirit who lives in each one of us through faith, and works in us to guide and lead us, and to create the bond of fellowship with each other, so we belong to God's family.

So with Father son and holy spirit guiding us through life, we know that we will **come to the inheritance of the saints in glory.**

Betsy, Bobby and Faye, may God, who has received you by baptism into his Church, pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit, and come to the inheritance of the saints in glory. Amen

Rev Paul Greenland.